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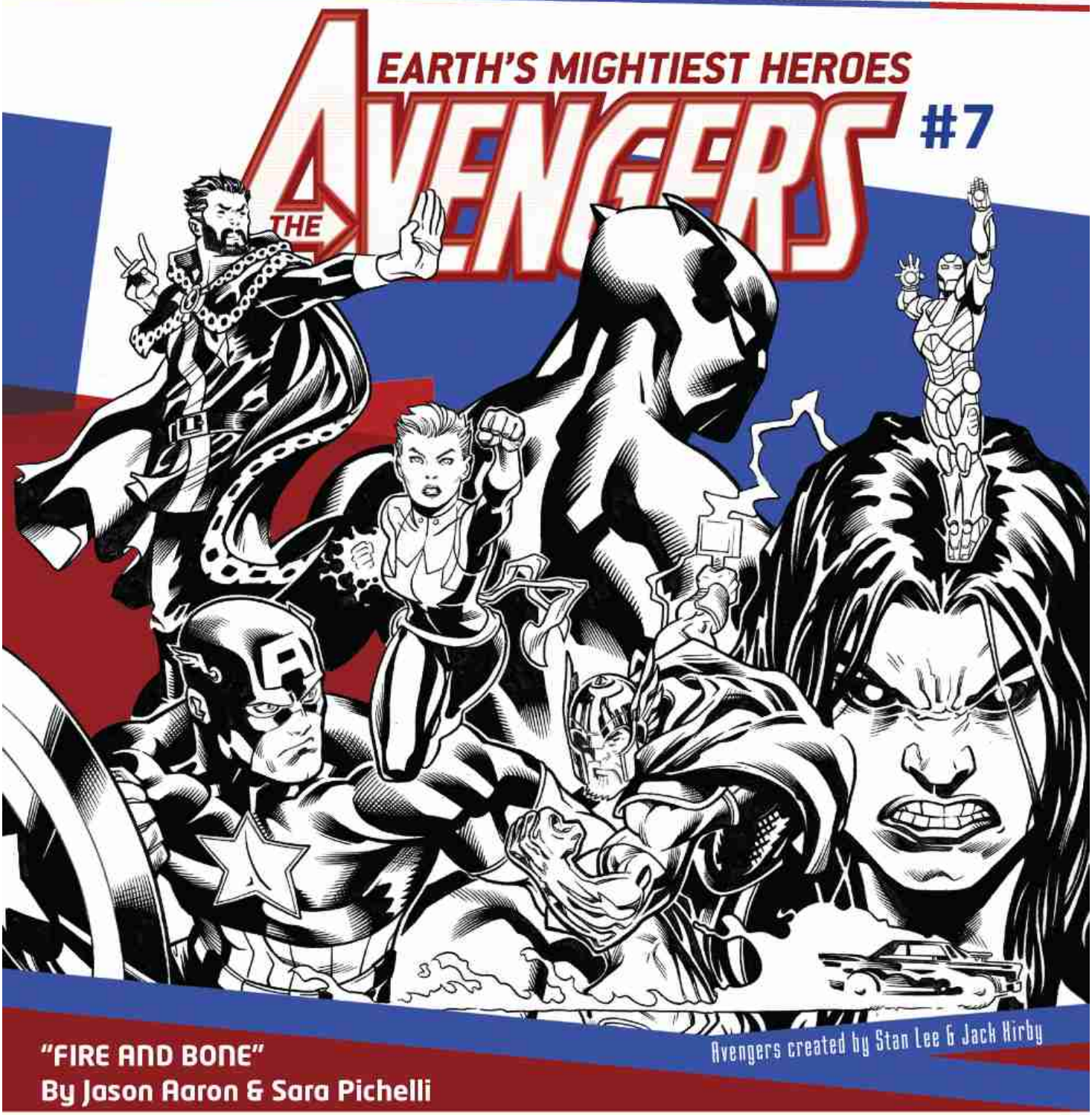
LGY#697
JASON AARON • SARA PICHELLI • JUSTIN PONSOR
EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES
THE AVENGERS

One million years ago, before the dawn of civilization, Odin assembled a motley crew of prehistoric Avengers.

One of the most powerful and dangerous of their number... was the very first Ghost Rider.



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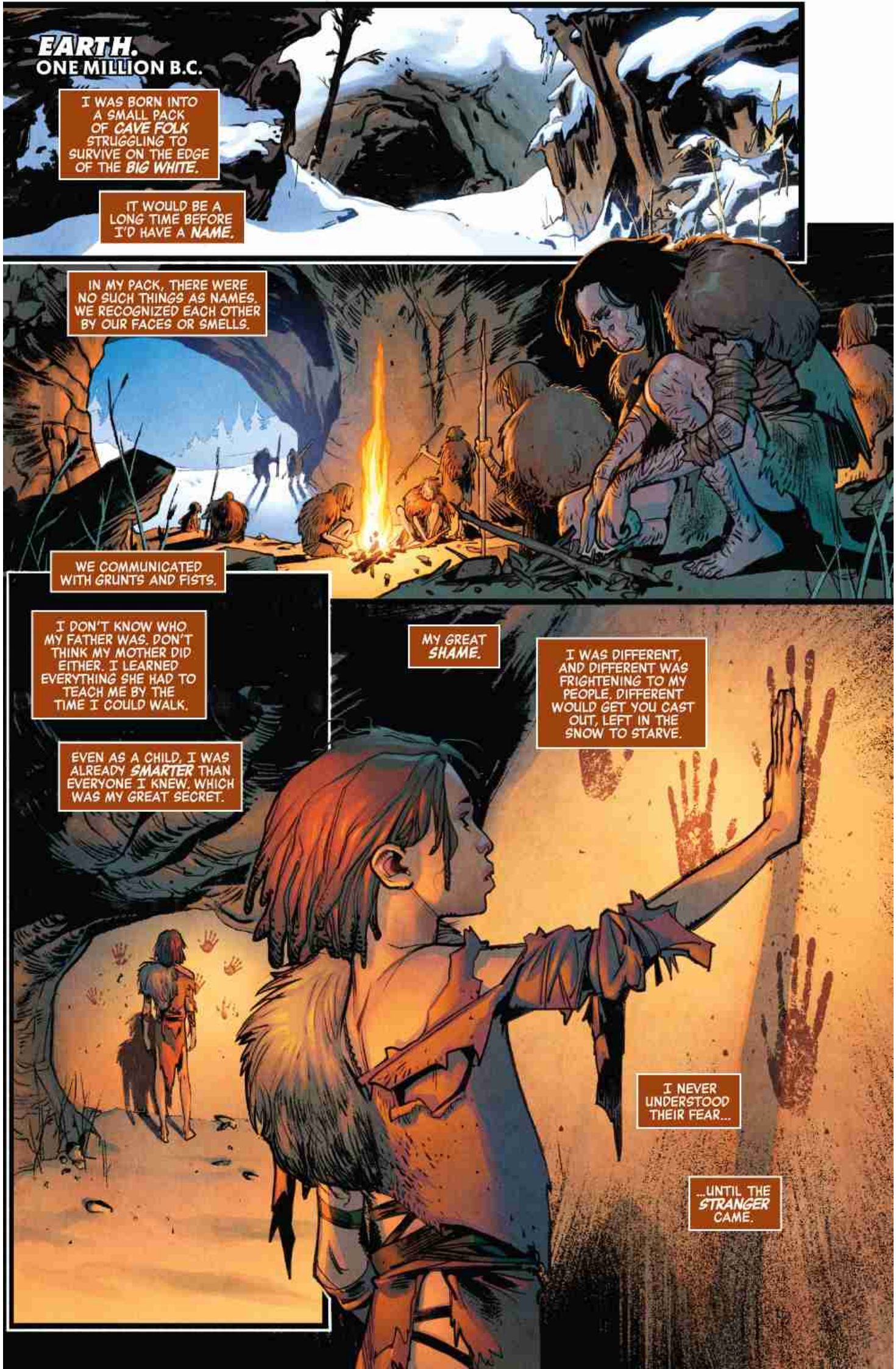
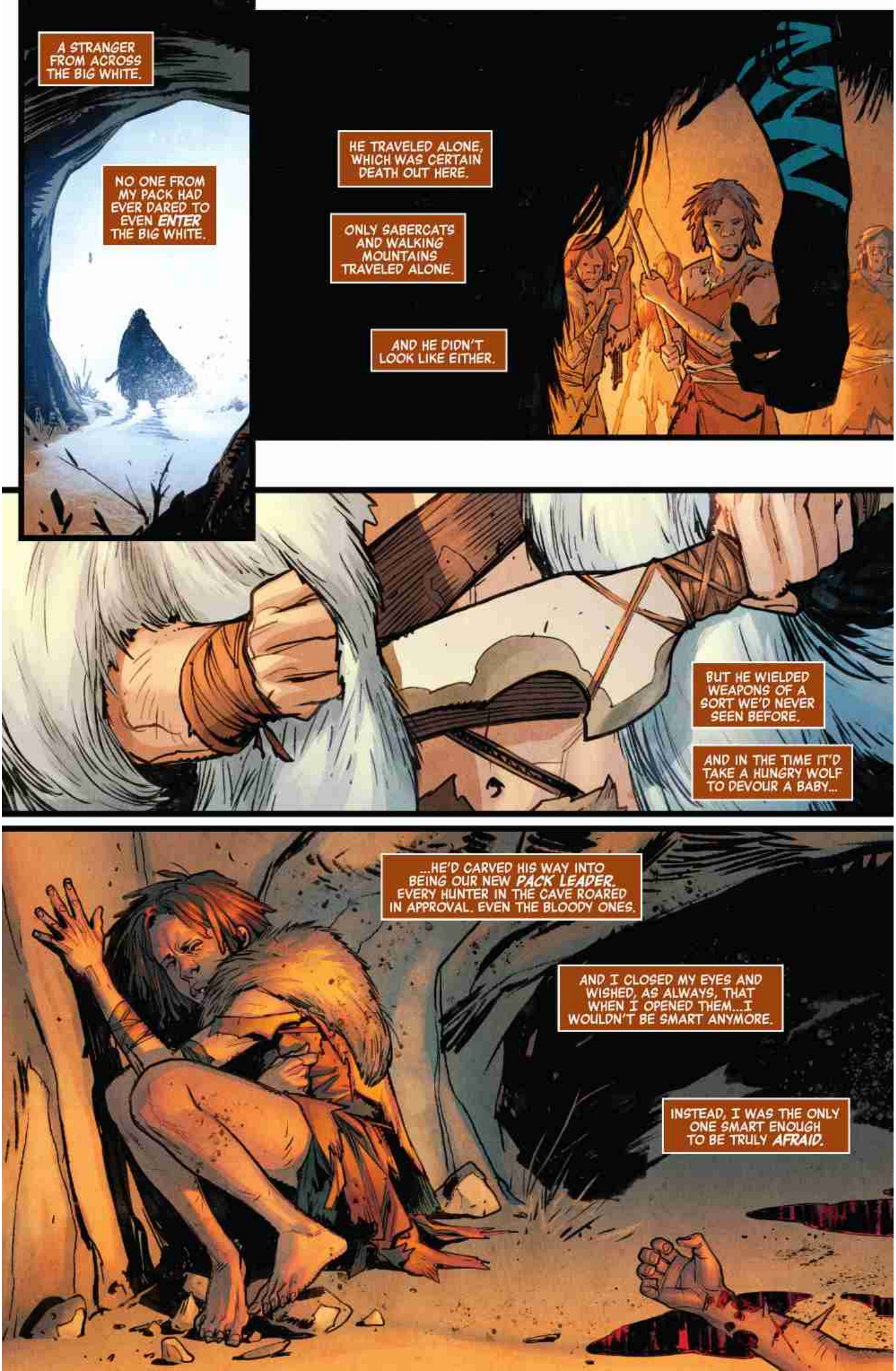
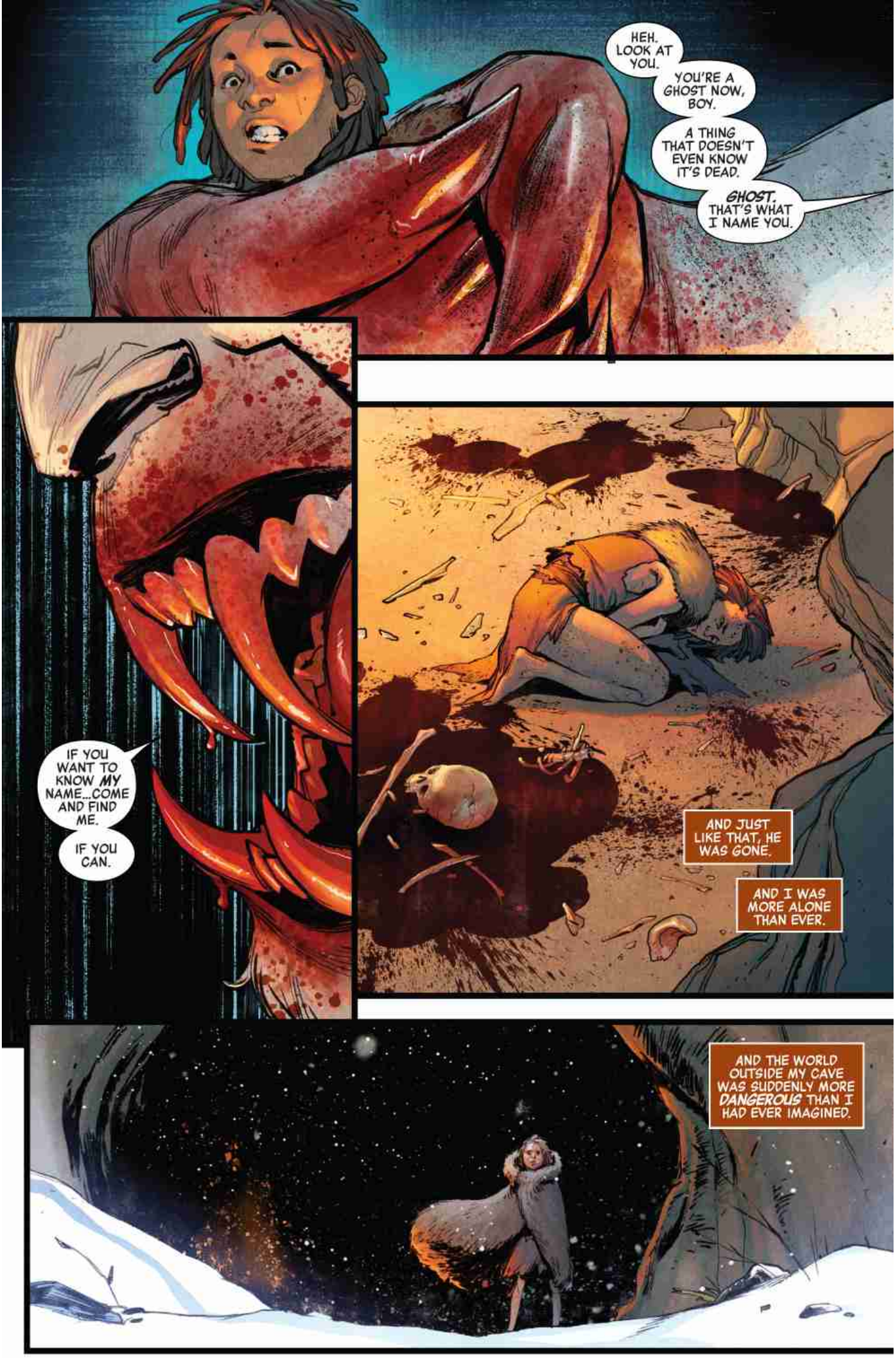

EARTH.
ONE MILLION B.C.
I WAS BORN INTO A SMALL PACK OF CAVE FOLK STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE ON THE EDGE OF THE BIG WHITE.
IT WOULD BE A LONG TIME BEFORE I'D HAVE A NAME.
IN MY PACK, THERE WERE NO SUCH THINGS AS NAMES. WE RECOGNIZED EACH OTHER BY OUR FACES OR SMELLS.
WE COMMUNICATED WITH GRUNTS AND FISTS.
I DON'T KNOW WHO MY FATHER WAS. DON'T THINK MY MOTHER DID EITHER. I LEARNED EVERYTHING SHE HAD TO TEACH ME BY THE TIME I COULD WALK.
EVEN AS A CHILD, I WAS ALREADY SMARTER THAN EVERYONE I KNEW. WHICH WAS MY GREAT SECRET.
MY GREAT SHAME.
I WAS DIFFERENT, AND DIFFERENT WAS FRIGHTENING TO MY PEOPLE. DIFFERENT WOULD GET YOU CAST OUT, LEFT IN THE SNOW TO STARVE.
I NEVER UNDERSTOOD THEIR FEAR...
...UNTIL THE STRANGER CAME.


A STRANGER FROM ACROSS THE BIG WHITE.
NO ONE FROM MY PACK HAD EVER DARED TO EVEN ENTER THE BIG WHITE.
HE TRAVELED ALONE, WHICH WAS CERTAIN DEATH OUT HERE.
ONLY SABERCATS AND WALKING MOUNTAINS TRAVELED ALONE.
AND HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE EITHER.
BUT HE WIELDED WEAPONS OF A SORT WE'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
AND IN THE TIME IT'D TAKE A HUNGRY WOLF TO DEVOUR A BABY...
...HE'D CARVED HIS WAY INTO BEING OUR NEW PACK LEADER. EVERY HUNTER IN THE CAVE ROARED IN APPROVAL. EVEN THE BLOODY ONES.
AND I CLOSED MY EYES AND WISHED, AS ALWAYS, THAT WHEN I OPENED THEM...I WOULDN'T BE SMART ANYMORE.
INSTEAD, I WAS THE ONLY ONE SMART ENOUGH TO BE TRULY AFRAID.

I KNOW HOW ALONE YOU FEEL.
YOU'VE NEVER MET ANYONE ELSE LIKE YOU, HAVE YOU?
IT'S OKAY. YOU CAN SPEAK FREELY. I WON'T LET THEM HURT YOU IF THEY HEAR.
I DIDN'T KNOW...
...THERE WERE OTHERS...
...WHO COULD MAKE THE SOUNDS.
THERE ARE A FEW. SCATTERED AMONG THE PACKS OF APE-MEN ALL ACROSS THE LAND.
ALL OF THEM BORN DIFFERENT. SMARTER THAN THEY HAVE ANY RIGHT TO BE.
HOW IS THIS? HOW DO I KNOW THESE THINGS?

I COME FROM A PACK THAT FEARED EVERYTHING OUTSIDE THEIR CAVE.
THEY'D SCREAM AND CRY EVERY NIGHT WHEN THE BIG RED BALL WENT AWAY. THEY ALWAYS THOUGHT THE WORLD WAS ENDING.
EVERY SINGLE NIGHT OF MY LIFE.
AND THEN, ONE PARTICULARLY DARK EVENING...THEY WERE FINALLY RIGHT.
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW WE'RE BORN DIFFERENT. BUT THE WHY IS CLEAR.
WE ARE THIS WORLD'S TRUE MASTERS.
AND THEM?
THEY HELP US BECOME WHAT WE'RE MEANT TO BE.
HOW DO THEY DO THAT?
BY DYING. THAT'S ALL THEY REALLY KNOW HOW TO DO.
WHAT... WHAT WAS IT THAT HAPPENED TO YOUR PACK? HOW DID THE WORLD END FOR THEM?
THE SAME WAY IT ALWAYS ENDS OUT HERE. SOMETHING FOUND THEM. SOMETHING STRONGER.
SOMETHING HUNGRY.

IN ONE NIGHT, HE KILLED AND *ATE* THEM ALL.
EVERYONE I'D EVER KNOWN.
RRRRGGHH!!!
HE WASN'T A SABERCAT OR A WALKING MOUNTAIN.
HE WAS SOMETHING MUCH WORSE.
HUGHK.
SOMETHING FOR WHICH... I HAD NO WORDS.


HEH. LOOK AT YOU.
YOU'RE A GHOST NOW, BOY.
A THING THAT DOESN'T EVEN KNOW IT'S DEAD.
GHOST. THAT'S WHAT I NAME YOU.
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MY NAME...COME AND FIND ME.
IF YOU CAN.
AND JUST LIKE THAT, HE WAS GONE.
AND I WAS MORE ALONE THAN EVER.
AND THE WORLD OUTSIDE MY CAVE WAS SUDDENLY MORE DANGEROUS THAN I HAD EVER IMAGINED.

IF HE COULD SURVIVE THE BIG WHITE, THEN SO COULD I, I TOLD MYSELF.
OR MAYBE I WAS JUST LOOKING FOR AN EASY WAY TO DIE.
EITHER WAY, I DIDN'T FIND WHAT I WAS LOOKING FOR.
UUGH.
INSTEAD, SOMETHING FOUND *ME*.
IF YOU WISSSH TO DIE, I CAN SSEND YOU ON YOUR WAY.
BUT I'D MUCH RATHER HELP YOU *LIVE*.

SNAKES... CAN'T TALK.
HOW DO YOU KNOW? YOU ONLY JUSST LEARNED HOW TO TALK YOURSSELF.
DIDN'T YOU? LITTLE GHOSSST.
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT NAME? WHAT ARE... UGHK.
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SSEARCHING FOR OUT HERE, MY YOUNG FRIEND. I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT ABOVE ALL ELSSE.
AND I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GIVE IT TO YOU.
PAIN.
PUNISHMENT.
VENGEANCE.
YOU MIGHT SSAY THOSE ARE MY SSSSSPECIALTIESS.
THE SNAKE TALKED FOR A VERY LONG TIME. UNTIL I THOUGHT EVERY PART OF ME WOULD FREEZE SOLID.
IT PROMISED ME THAT I WOULD FIND THE MAN I WAS HUNTING. THAT I WOULD HAVE REVENGE. MORE REVENGE THAN I COULD POSSIBLY IMAGINE.
BUT MOSTLY IT PROMISED ME ONE THING...

WARM. DON'T YOU WANT TO BE WARM AGAIN?
IT'S SSSO VERY COLD OUT HERE, ISN'T IT?
BUT DON'T WORRY, MY SSSWEET GHOST. I CAN MAKE IT SSO YOU'RE NEVER COLD AGAIN.

JUST SSAY MY NAME. NAMESS ARE POWER IN THIS WORLD. YOU KNOW THAT, DON'T YOU, GHOSSST?
YOU KNOW MY NAME. SSAY IT. IT'S RIGHT THERE ON THE TIP OF YOUR TONGUE.
SSSAY MY NAME AND OUR DEAL ISS DONE.

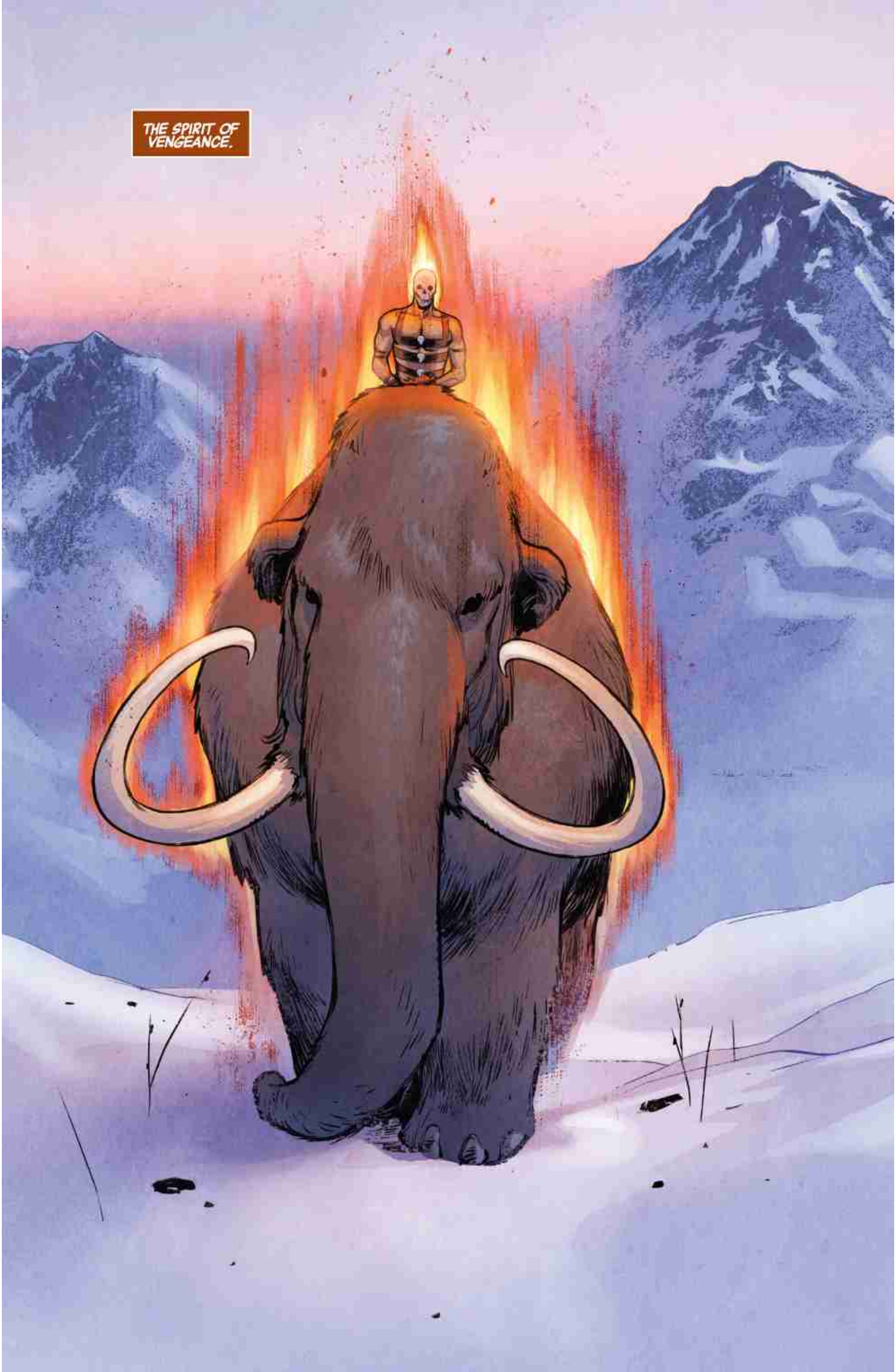
MHM...
MUUH...
MEPHISTO.

HA!
AGGH! WHA... WHAT'S...

I WOULD COME TO MISS THE COLD.
ARRRGGGH!!!

SINCE THEN, I'VE FORGOTTEN HOW ANYTHING FEELS OTHER THAN BURNING.
HA HAA HAAA HA HAA!
ARRRGGH!!!
SPLLTCH
BUT AT LEAST I WASN'T ALONE ANYMORE.
RRRRGGGH!

FIVE YEARS LATER.
IN THE TIME SINCE THEN, I'VE BEEN GIVEN NEW NAMES.
THE RIDER, THEY CALL ME. BECAUSE MOST HAVE NEVER SEEN A MAN ASTRIDE A BEAST.
SNFF SNFF
HEH.
NOT THAT I'M A MAN ANYMORE, REALLY. I'M WHAT HE NAMED ME.
I'M MORE GHOST THAN MAN.
MORE FIRE THAN FLESH. MORE SPIRIT THAN BONE.
'BOUT TIME, BOY.


THE SPIRIT OF VENGEANCE.

HGGK!
IT TOOK A LOT OF RIDING, BUT I FOUND YOU.
A LOT OF FOLLOWING THE RUIN YOU LEAVE BEHIND WHEREVER YOU WANDER.
BUT NO MORE.
I'VE COME FOR YOUR NAME. AND EVERYTHING ELSE YOU'VE GOT.
LITTLE GHOST. ALL GROWN UP AND TOUCHED BY FIRE.
YOU SURPRISE ME, BOY.
I'M NOT A BOY ANYMORE, YOU MONSTER.
AND *I'M* NOT A ***MONSTER***. JUST A MAN WHO DOES WHAT IT TAKES TO SURVIVE.
YOU WANT MY NAME, RIDER? I'LL TELL YOU.
BUT IT'S THE LAST THING YOU'LL EVER HEAR.

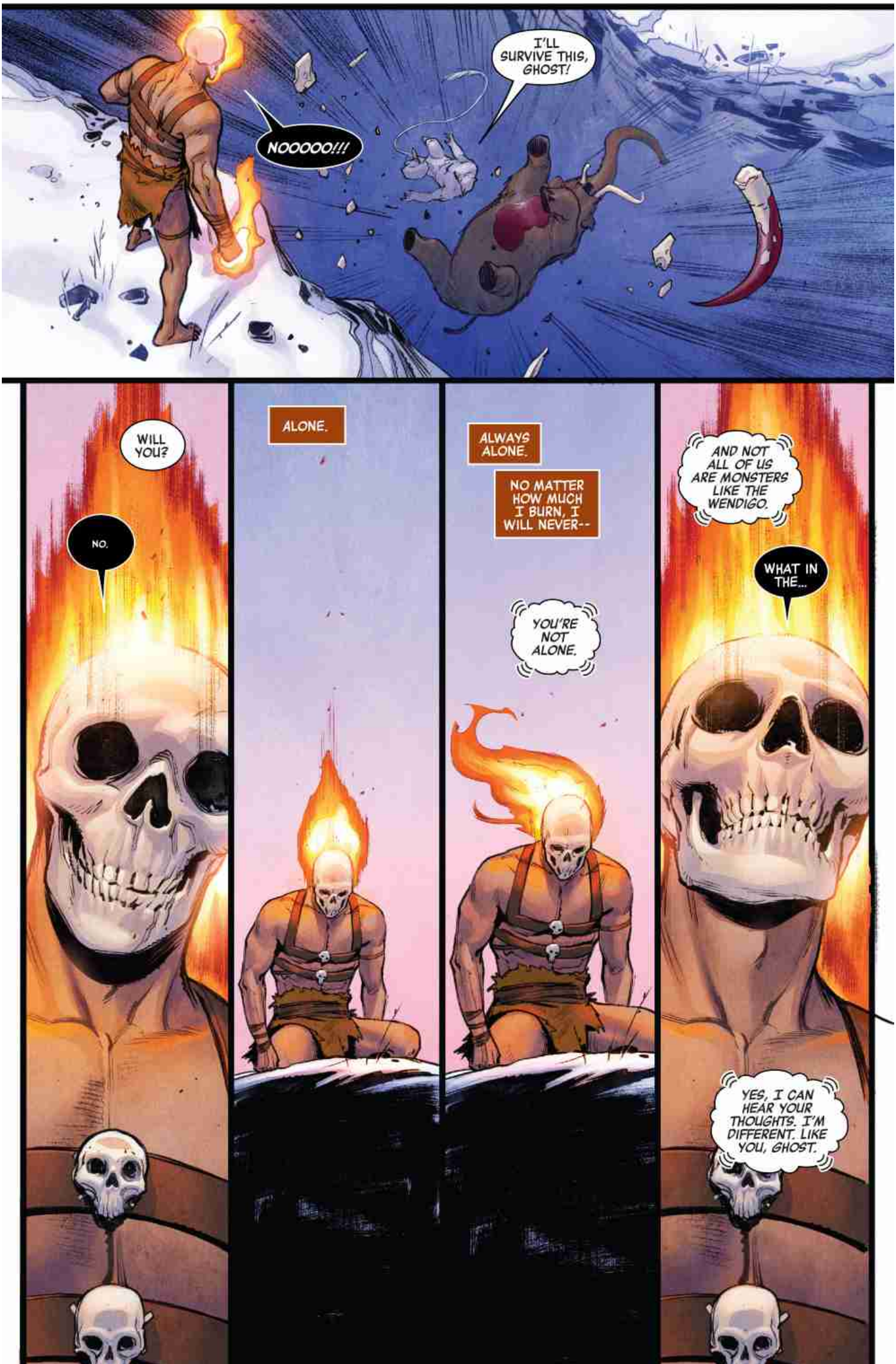
WEN-DI-GO!
NOW GET READY TO WARM MY BELLY!
OH, WE'LL WARM YOU UP ALL RIGHT!
FWWOOOSH

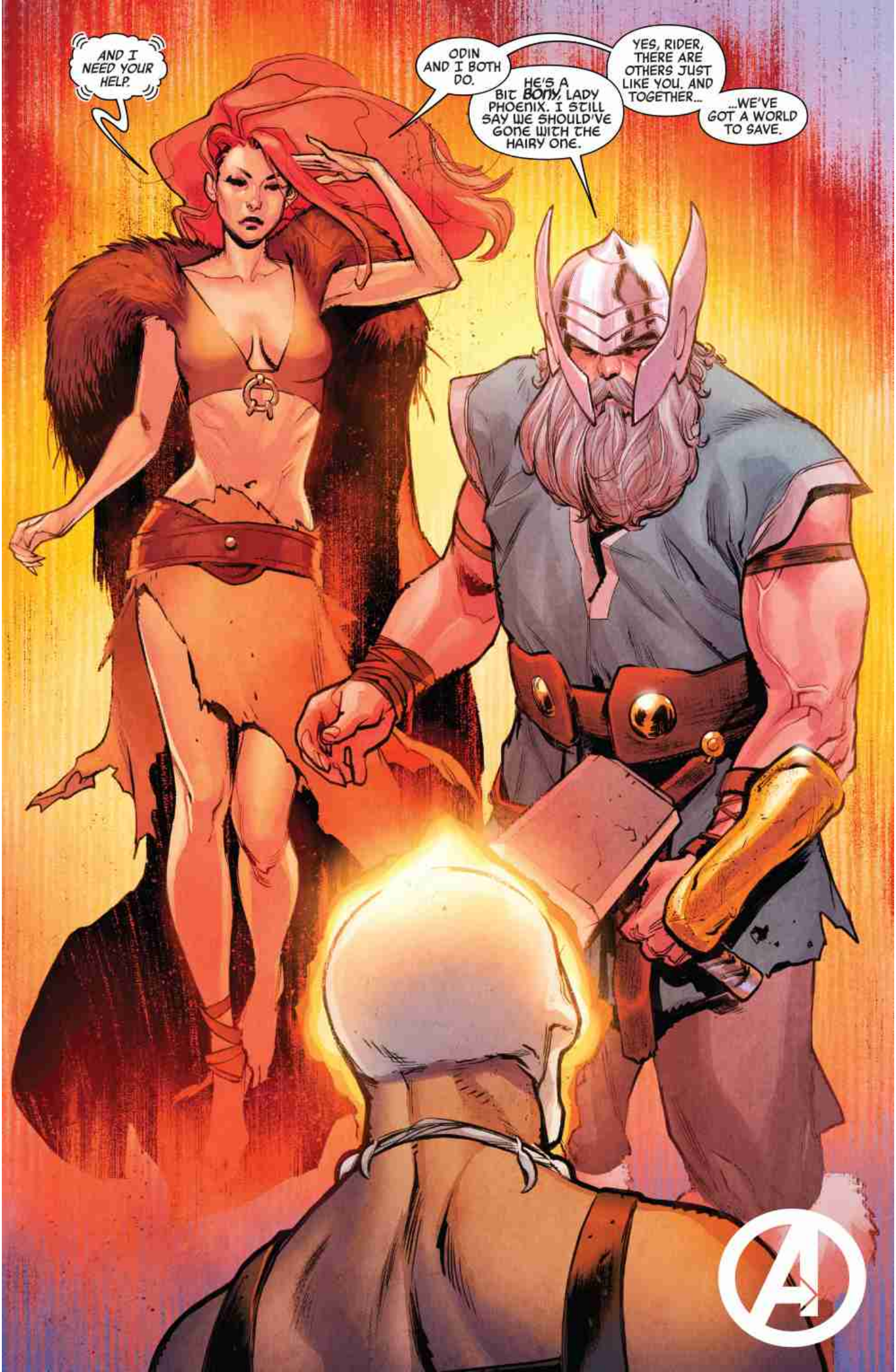
SO MUCH POWER YOU'VE STUMBLED INTO.
AND STILL SUCH A FOOL.
GAAGH!
YOU CALL ME A MONSTER BECAUSE I FEED ON MANFLESH. BUT I SEE THE TRUTH IN YOU, RIDER. YOU FEED ON SOULS.
WHO'S REALLY THE BIGGER MONSTER?
WE BOTH ARE. BUT THERE'S ONLY ROOM IN THIS WORLD FOR ONE OF US!
YOU REALLY THINK WE'RE THE ONLY MONSTERS IN THE WORLD?
YOU'RE MORE OF A FOOL THAN I THOUGHT, BOY.
UUUGH!

THIS...THIS IS YOUR DEN, ISN'T IT? BY THE STARS...
HOW MANY HAVE YOU EATEN?
NOT ENOUGH. IT'S NEVER ENOUGH.
THE MORE I EAT, THE STRONGER I GROW, THE LONGER I LIVE.
SOON, I WILL BE LIKE THE GODS.
THE BONES SAY DIFFERENT, WENDIGO.
THE BONES SAY YOU'VE EATEN YOUR FILL.
GRRRGH!
NOW IT'S THEIR TURN TO FEED.

RRRGGGH!
IN THE NAME OF VENGEANCE, I CONDEMN YOU, WENDIGO, TO BURN FOR AS LONG AS THERE'S FIRE IN THE WORLD!
TO FALL FOREVER INTO DAMNATION! TO SUFFER FOR ALL ETERNITY!
JUST LIKE ME.
HRRRRGGGH!!!
NO!
HNNGH!
AS LONG AS THERE IS HUNGER, THERE WILL BE THE WENDIGO!
THE WENDIGO IS THE STRONGEST ONE THERE--

GRAAARRGH!
GAAARRGH!
GOOD WORK, GIRL. NOW LET ME FINISH HIM OFF BEFORE...
RELYING ON ANIMALS-- YOU'LL NEVER BE STRONG ENOUGH.
NOT UNTIL YOU BECOME ONE YOURSELF. I CAN HELP WITH THAT.
NO!


I'LL SURVIVE THIS, GHOST!
NOOOOO!!!
WILL YOU?
NO.
ALONE.
ALWAYS ALONE.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH I BURN, I WILL NEVER--
YOU'RE NOT ALONE.
AND NOT ALL OF US ARE MONSTERS LIKE THE WENDIGO.
WHAT IN THE...
YES, I CAN HEAR YOUR THOUGHTS. I'M DIFFERENT. LIKE YOU, GHOST.


AND I NEED YOUR HELP.
ODIN AND I BOTH DO.
HE'S A BIT *BORN,* LADY PHOENIX. I STILL SAY WE SHOULD'VE GONE WITH THE HAIRY ONE.
YES, RIDER, THERE ARE OTHERS JUST LIKE YOU. AND TOGETHER...
...WE'VE GOT A WORLD TO SAVE.

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

THE AVENGERS #8

In the aftermath of their world-shaking battle against the Dark Celestials, the new Avengers team is officially formed, complete with a startling new headquarters at the top of the world. Behold the wonders of Avengers Mountain!

But someone isn't impressed: Namor, the ferocious lord of Atlantis, whose rage may turn the oceans red with blood!

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE! EMAIL US AT MHEROES@MARVEL.COM AND MARK YOUR MESSAGES "OKAY TO PRINT" FOR A CHANCE TO SEE THEM ANSWERED IN FUTURE ISSUES!

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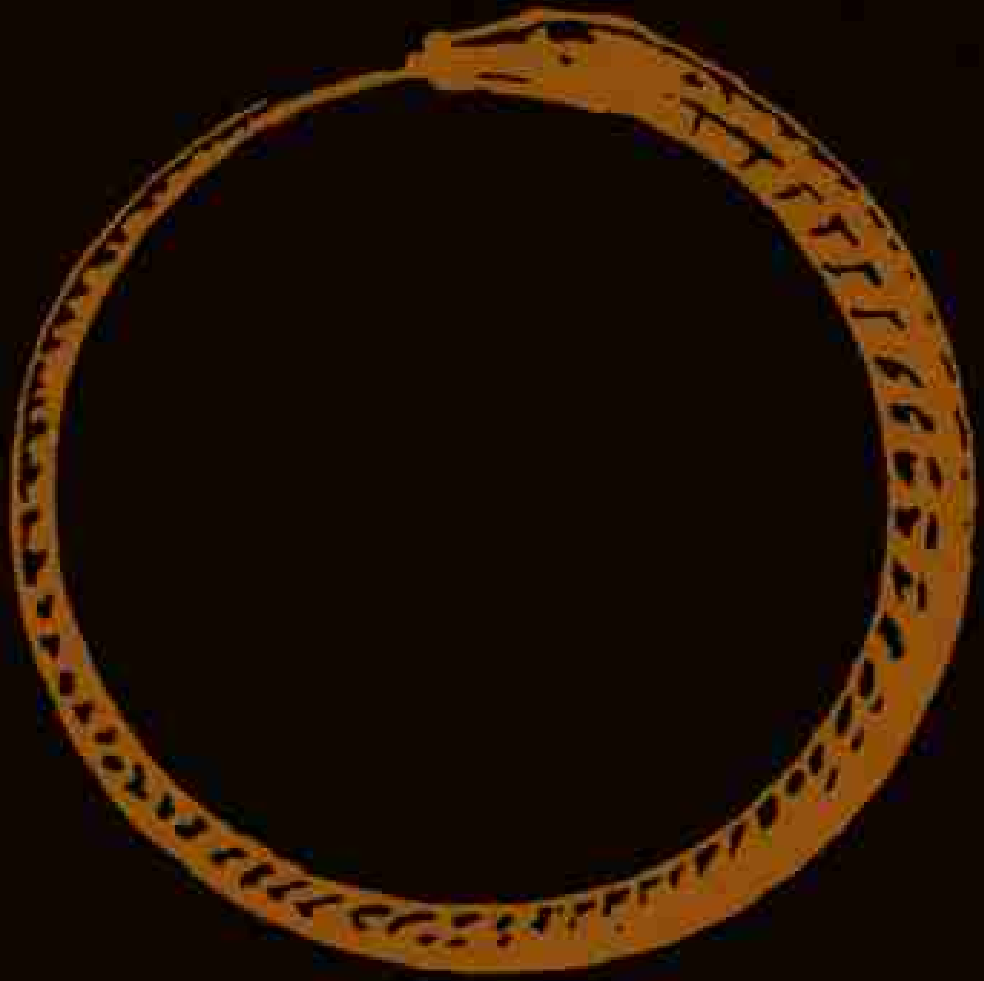

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